

Aenesidemus Was Not an Academic

Abstract: Aenesidemus, the (re-)founder of Pyrrhonian skepticism, is usually said to have begun his career by breaking away from the Academy. This assertion rests on the word “συναίρεσιώτη” as it appears in Photius’ summary of Aenesidemus’ *Pyrrhonian Discourses*. I argue that Photius’ probable understanding of the Academy’s history undermines this traditional reading. I then examine the evidence external to Photius and conclude that it also speaks against the traditional narrative.

Keywords: Aenesidemus, Pyrrhonism, Academic Skepticism, Skepticism

Open almost any discussion of the history of skepticism written in the last 150 years and you will find the claim that Aenesidemus, reviver of the radically skeptical Pyrrhonist tradition, was a renegade member of the skeptical New Academy.¹ The traditional story goes something like this: in the wake of Carneades’ introduction of the Stoic criterion as acceptable in at least some form for Academic philosophizing (most likely as a foundation for a form of probabilism), discontent emerged within the Academy over the correct interpretation of Carneades’ position. After a brief internal struggle between Metrodorus and Clitomachus, three distinct camps emerged, at least for a short time: the original institution of the Academy survived, with Philo of Larissa at its helm, espousing a middle way between Stoicism and skepticism; Antiochus of Ascalon broke away from the Academy to form the “Old Academy,” which accepted Stoic philosophizing with little to no qualification; and Aenesidemus broke away to form the “Pyrrhonist school,” preaching a return to radical skepticism and a rejection of Stoic influence. The picture that emerges of Aenesidemus is that of a rebel who turned against the watered down, probabilistic skepticism of his teachers in favor of a radical global skepticism that he would trace back, post-facto, to Pyrrho.

The story is a good one, and it provides a pleasing parallelism—one pro-skepticism breakaway group, one anti-. But while our evidence for the Academic origin of Antiochus’ Old Academy is incontrovertible (it is, after all, right there in the name), the Academic origin of Aenesidemus’ Pyrrhonism is far less certain. In fact, our evidence for the idea that Aenesidemus was a renegade Academic rests on one word in one book, Photius’ *Bibliotheca*—and it is not a particularly straightforward word. I will begin by examining this word in its context as well as the debate that has cropped up around it. By examining what Photius’ historical sources would have told him about the history of skepticism, which has not been done in the existing debate, I will find that, contra the received reading, the evidence internal to Photius does not support any institutional link between Aenesidemus and the Academy. I will also, as has not been previously done, examine the evidence for Aenesidemus’ Academic affiliation *external* to Photius. Ultimately, I will find that this external evidence opposes the traditional narrative as well. I conclude that scholars have been mistaken to attribute any link with the Academy to Aenesidemus and canvass some consequences of this.

I. Photius

Here is the line—from the beginning of Photius’ summary of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*—from which all statements concerning Aenesidemus’ membership of the Academy derive:

¹ As far as I can tell, this story has its origin in Brochard’s classic *Les sceptiques grecs* (1887), 244. For more examples, see Striker 1981, Striker 1983, Annas and Barnes 1985, Frede 1999, Barnes 2000, Bett 2000, Bailey 2002, Thorsrud 2009, Hankinson 2010, Machuca 2011, Bett 2019, Brittain 2021, and Vogt 2022, among others. A notable exception is Castagnoli 2019, who approaches the question appropriately cautiously. The introduction to the very same collection in which Castagnoli’s essay appears, however, asserts that Aenesidemus’ Academic origins are “almost unanimously accepted” (Machuca and Reed 2018, 8).

γράφει δὲ τοὺς λόγους Αἰνησίδημος προσφωνῶν αὐτοὺς τῶν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας τινὶ συναρῆσιώτῃ Λευκίῳ Τοβέρωνι, γένος μὲν Ῥωμαίῳ, δόξη δὲ λαμπρῶ ἐκ προγόνων καὶ πολιτικᾶς ἀρχᾶς οὐ τὰς τυχοῦσας μετιόντι. (*Bibliotheca* 169b31-34)

Aenesidemus wrote the *Discourses* addressing them to a certain Academic συναρῆσιώτῃ, Lucius Tubero, a Roman by birth with an illustrious ancestry and a distinguished political career. (Long and Sedley trans. 1987a, 71C 11, with modifications.)

The key word is συναρῆσιώτῃ. The usual way of understanding it is as “co-αρῆσις member,” αρῆσις being understood not in its sense of “heresy” but in its sense of “school.” This understanding leads to translations like the one provided by Long and Sedley:

In writing the discourses, Aenesidemus addresses them to Lucius Tubero, one of his colleagues from the Academy, a Roman by birth, with an illustrious ancestry and a distinguished political career.

The traditional reading is almost universally accepted, but it has found its challengers among those who take the sense of “heresy” to be more relevant to Photius’s use of αρῆσις and related words than the sense of “school.” It will thus be worth our while to recount the debate surrounding it before arriving at any definite conclusions.

A. The Συναρῆσιώτης Debate

Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, in her 1992 “Aenesidemus and the Academy,” raises some important doubts about the traditional understanding of Photius’ “συναρῆσιώτῃ.” As she notes, the word is in fact extremely rare, and its main use (outside of astrological contexts, where it had a technical meaning) was among Christian authors to describe heretics (Decleva Caizzi 1992, 182-3). Outside of the Aenesidemus passage, Photius always uses it in the *Bibliotheca* to describe Arians. She also alleges that the συν- need not pick out an external referent like Aenesidemus, but may instead refer to τῶν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας directly, giving συναρῆσιώτῃ the sense of “αρῆσις member” rather than “co-αρῆσις member” (Decleva Caizzi 1992, 184). This would induce a translation something like the following:

Aenesidemus wrote the *Discourses* addressing them to one Lucius Tubero, a member of the (heretical) Academic sect and a Roman by birth, with an illustrious ancestry and a distinguished political career.

Decleva Caizzi suggests that Photius uses συναρῆσιώτῃ purely to give a negative flavor to his mention of Lucius Tubero’s adherence to the Academy—a flavor repeated at the end of his report when he insults the Pyrrhonist position he has just summarized. This reading, of course, leaves Aenesidemus with no clear connection to the Academy at all, other than his obvious friendship with Tubero. On the basis of this rereading, Decleva Caizzi draws the conclusions that a relatively isolated Aenesidemus, with access to Timon’s work and not much else, was spurred to his Pyrrhonist revival via conversations with the Academic Lucius Tubero (Decleva Caizzi 1992, 186-8).

Contra Decleva Caizzi, the traditional reading of the passage has been defended by Jaap Mansfeld, who musters quite a bit of textual evidence against the possibility of her revisionist interpretation. Mansfeld takes two tacks. First, he argues against the grammaticality of Decleva Caizzi’s reading by asserting that συναρῆσιώτῃ qualifies τινὶ, which should be linked to the genitive τῶν (Mansfeld 1995, 243). Second, he makes it clear that there exists no extant usage of

συναρπαιστώτης in which there is not an external fellow member of the αἵρεσις naturally implicated by the term (Mansfeld 1995, 243-5). Decleva Caizzi's suggestion that the συν- might bypass a reference to Aenesidemus is thus rendered monumentally unlikely. The evidence on this latter front is, in the view of most commentators, basically overwhelming.² The reading that emerges is clear: συναρπαιστώτη cannot be read as simply meaning "member of a heresy/school," it must rather mean "co-member of a heresy/school."

Finally, a broadly Decleva-Caizzian reading is defended by Polito, who concedes Mansfeld's reading of the συν- prefix but doubles down on Decleva Caizzi's suggestion that Photius' use of συναρπαιστώτης always comes with a negative connotation (à la "heretic") (See Polito 2002 and Polito 2014). He thus proposes the following reading:

Aenesidemus composes his *Arguments* dedicating them to a certain Academic fellow sect-member, Lucius Tubero, Roman by nationality, of illustrious family reputation, and running for distinguished political offices. (Polito 2014, A1)

Polito's suggestion is that Photius means to run together the Pyrrhonian Aenesidemus and the Academic Tubero as fellow members of the broader sect of skepticism. As Decleva Caizzi noted, Photius obviously takes a dim view of the skeptical persuasion, so a negative assessment of both schools is quite likely. On this reading, Photius takes Pyrrhonists and Academics to be two sub-groups of one and the same heresy: skepticism.

B. Taking Stock of the Debate

Polito's reading is clever, but it runs into two difficulties. The first is that even if we concede that συναρπαιστώτης carries a negative connotation, this need not recommend a reading on which Aenesidemus and Tubero belong to different schools. Rendering συναρπαιστώτης as "fellow sect-member" or "co-heretic" is certainly consistent with a reading on which Pyrrhonians and Academics are two sub-groups of one larger heretical sect, but it is just as consistent with the more straightforward meaning that the two individuals simply belong to one and the same sect, no sub-groups involved.

The second difficulty is textual. For in the very next sentence of his summary, Photius immediately launches into a quite extensive recounting of the differences Aenesidemus enumerates between Pyrrhonism and the Academy. This summary begins with Aenesidemus accusing all Academics of dogmatism and differentiating them from Pyrrhonists in stark terms. Academics, we are told, "are dogmatist: and posit certain things without hesitation, while others they do away with without ambiguity" (*Bibliotheca* 169b 38-40, Polito trans.). Pyrrhonists, on the other hand, are "free from any dogma" (*Bibliotheca* 169b 41). It then moves on to a characterization of the Academics of his own day as resembling nothing so much as "Stoics fighting with Stoics" before ending with an accusation of self-contradiction that applies to Academics but not Pyrrhonists (*Bibliotheca* 170a 16-17, 17-38). The difference between the two schools is presented as vast, particularly in Aenesidemus' own time, and the passage includes no indication that Photius is interested in disagreeing with Aenesidemus on this point. Why, then, would he present Aenesidemus as a follower of the same broad αἵρεσις as an Academic? Polito's reading seems to be on quite shaky ground here.

The traditional interpretation is better able to accommodate Aenesidemus' account of the Academy's dogmatism, although still not entirely successful. For if συναρπαιστώτης picks out an

² See e.g. Bett 2000, Polito 2002, Thorsrud 2009, Hankinson 2010, Bett 2019 37 n30, Brittain 2021.

institutional rather than a *doctrinal* connection, it would be possible to use the term prior to an elucidation of doctrinal difference. The traditional reading, however, is not without problems of its own. For the institutional connection usually assumed to be shared by Aenesidemus and Tubero is common membership of the Academy, but Photius describes Aenesidemus and Tubero as συναρσιώτᾱ *in the present tense* rather than as ex-συναρσιώτᾱ—Γράφει δὲ τοὺς λόγους Αἰνησίδημος προσφωνῶν αὐτοὺς τῶν ἐξ Ἀκαδημίας τινὶ συναρσιώτῃ Λευκίῳ Τοβέρωνι. If we understand συναρσιώτῃ to be pointing to common membership in the Academy of Aenesidemus and Tubero's day, the sentence's tense causes the same problem we previously identified with Polito's reading: it cannot make sense of the subsequent discussion of the stark differences between Aenesidemus' school and the Academy.

Defenders of the traditional reading might object that συναρσιώτης could have accommodated this meaning too, i.e. that two individuals could remain συναρσιώτᾱ even after one of them broke away from the αἵρεσις in question. While this may be true, it would be bizarre not to at least make a note of the fact that this description was only *formerly* the case in a context where one immediately—in the next sentence!—proceeds to elucidate a set of large-scale differences between the schools of those two individuals. In fact, we have an example of just how Photius would address such a situation in the *Amphilochia*, question 154. In a discussion of the different Greek translations of the Old Testament, Photius describes a translation produced by one Theodotion:

Τετάρτη ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ Θεοδοτίωνος τοῦ Ἐφεσίου· οὗτος τῆς αἰρέσεως Μαρκίωνος τοῦ Ποντικοῦ γεγονῶς καὶ τοῖς συναρσιώταις μηνίων ἔκδοσιν ἰδίαν ἐποίησατο τῆς γραφῆς, Κομμόδον τὴν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείαν χειρίζοντος.

Fourth is that of Theodotion of Ephesus. He began as a follower (αἰρέσεως) of Marcion of Pontus and wrote and published it out of wrath for his fellow sect members (συναρσιώταις) when Commodus was ruler of the Roman Empire. (*Amphilochia* Qu. 154, 18, translation mine)

In this passage, Photius describes a work produced by a former member of a sect as a result of a disagreement with his former συναρσιώται—precisely the situation the traditional reading attributes to Aenesidemus vis-à-vis the Academics. Here, though, even in this highly compact passage, Photius is careful to note that Theodotion did not *remain* a Marcionite, but merely *began* (γεγονῶς) as one. This clarification that Theodotion was an ex-Marcionite (although, in fact, historically dubious) helps Photius explain the production of his new translation. For Photius, then, in a situation where a sect member is compelled to produce a work and break away from their sect due to a disagreement with their συναρσιώται, it bears noting that the συναρσιώτης status is past rather than present.

Both the traditional and the revisionary readings, then, stretch credibility. The traditional reading's institutional link can account for the logical leap from the συναρσιώτης passage to the following section in which the doctrinal differences between Academics and Pyrrhonists are discussed, but it cannot account for the present tense of the passage. Polito and Decleva Caizzi's revisionary reading, on the other hand, can account for the present tense insofar as a broad similarity can exist between two conflicting parties, but it cannot account for the level of difference laid out in the following section, which would seem to preclude an attribution of even the broadest similarity.

C. The Revised Revisionary Reading

Two desiderata have emerged from our discussion of the existing debate over Photius' use of συναρεισιώτη. First, any explanation of the term must account for Photius' use of the present tense: it must explain how Aenesidemus and Lucius Tubero could be described as συναρεισιώτᾱ rather than ex-συναρεισιώτᾱ. Second, a satisfactory reading must be consistent with Photius' immediate pivot to an explanation of the vast difference between Aenesidemus' and Tubero's schools, which is presented without qualification. Neither the traditional reading nor the revisionary Declava Caizzi-Polito position satisfy both of these desiderata. In the remainder of this section, I would like to propose a reading that does.

The traditional interpretation seemed like it was on the right track by reading συναρεισιώτης as referencing an institutional rather than doctrinal connection, but, as we have seen, the specific institutional link it proposed ran into major problems. Are there, then, any alternative institutional links that we might read Photius as referencing? Codex 212 itself doesn't offer much on this front—everything Photius says there about the relationship between the Pyrrhonists and Academics aside from the συναρεισιώτης passage itself comes from his summary of Aenesidemus' criticisms of the Academy. This information is purely doctrinal and not at all institutional—Academics make definitive claims, Pyrrhonists do not; Academics contradict themselves, Pyrrhonists do not; etc. *Other* codices, however, may provide a clue.

Of the works discussed in the *Bibliotheca* that have survived, two discuss the history of skeptical philosophy. These are Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* (cod. 9), which spends quite a bit of time in its fourteenth book quoting Numenius' history of the Academy, and (pseudo-)Hippolytus' *Refutation of All Heresies* (cod. 48), which includes the Academics in its list of Greek philosophical schools.³ Both of these works contain the same striking claim: that the teachings of Pyrrho himself were the origin of the skeptical Academy.

Numenius, in the extensive excerpts of his *On the Split of the Academics from Plato* quoted by Eusebius in *Praep. Evan.* xiv, is concerned to show how the Academy founded by Plato could have fallen into skepticism. He finds his answer in the idea that Arcesilaus, the founder of the skeptical “second” Academy, was a direct student of Pyrrho. Backed up seemingly only by some historical imputations of similarity between Arcesilaus' thought and Pyrrho's, Numenius asserts in no uncertain terms that Arcesilaus studied under Pyrrho and learned skepticism from him (*Praep. Evan.* xiv.v 12-14, xiv.vi 4-6). Ultimately, he sums up the situation in the following words:

λεχθεῖς οὖν ἂν αἰτία τῶν Πυρρωνείων Πυρρώνειος, αἰδοῖ τοῦ ἑραστοῦ ὑπέμεινε λέγεσαι Ἀκαδημαϊκὸς ἔτι. ἦν μὲν τοίνυν Πυρρώνειος, πλὴν τοῦ ὀνόματος· Ἀκαδημαϊκὸς δ' οὐκ ἦν, πλὴν τοῦ λέγεσθαι.

He therefore could have been called a Pyrrhonist due to his Pyrrhonism, but out of respect for his lover [Crantor the Academic] he submitted to being called an Academic. He was therefore a Pyrrhonist except in name, but he was not an Academic except in being so called. (*Praep. Evan.* xiv.vi 6, translation mine)

³ The work that has come down to us as the *Refutation of All Heresies* is mentioned by Photius as the *Labyrinth*, a name apparently derived from the author's remark at the beginning of the tenth book that he has “cut through the labyrinth of heresies.” Importantly, Photius quotes the *Labyrinth*, making it clear that he has read the work, despite the fact that he does not assign it a codex of its own. For the identification of the *Labyrinth* with the *Refutation*, see Brent 1995, Castelli 2012, and Litwa's “Introduction” to the *Refutation*.

Per Numenius (and thus Eusebius), then, Arcesilaus and all subsequent skeptical Academics should be understood as part of a Pyrrhonist lineage rather than a Platonic one. They were “Academics” in name only, for their philosophy originated from Arcesilaus, whose chief reference point was Pyrrho.

The author of the *Refutation* takes this claim one step further, claiming that Pyrrho was in fact the founder of the Academy:

Ἄλλη δὲ αἴρεσις φιλοσόφων ἐκλήθη Ἀκαδημαϊκὴ διὰ τὸ ἐν τῇ Ἀκαδημίᾳ τὰς διατριβὰς αὐτοὺς ποιῆσθαι. ὧν ἄρξας ὁ Πύρρων, ἀφ’ οὗ Πυρρώνειοι ἐκλήθησαν φιλόσοφοι, τὴν ἀκαταληψίαν ἀπάντων πρῶτος εἰσήγαγεν, ὡς ἐπιχειρεῖν μὲν εἰς ἑκάτερα, μὴ μέντοι ἀποφαίνεσθαι μηδέν.

Another sect of philosophers was called “Academic” because they debated in the Academy. Pyrrho initiated these debates; hence these philosophers were called “Pyrrhonists.” He was the first to introduce the incomprehensibility of all things (ἀκαταληψίαν ἀπάντων), with the result that he argued both sides of a debate, without asserting anything. (*Refutation* i 23.1, Litwa trans.)

While the specific claim here is clearly somewhat garbled, the gist remains the same, and the infelicities could easily be smoothed out with reference to a more extended account like that of Numenius. The general consensus among the sources Photius would have had access to, then, seems to have been that the origin of the skeptical Academy lay in Pyrrho just as much as that of Aenesidemus’ Pyrrhonist tradition did.

This claim is, of course, historically dubious at best—and the *Refutation*’s account is obviously wrong. It is possible that Arcesilaus drew inspiration from Timon, with whom he was certainly acquainted, but the idea that he was a student of Pyrrho’s has no other historical basis. The narrative seems, rather, to stem from a conflict over the legacy of the Academy among Middle Platonists. Anti-skeptics like Numenius drew a sharp distinction between the Academy of Plato and Speusippus and the skeptical Academy founded by Arcesilaus, while more sympathetic Platonists like Plutarch and the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* attempted to carve out a place for skeptical thinking within their own Platonic systems. For Numenius, writing long after Aenesidemus’ Pyrrhonist revival, the claim that Arcesilaus learned skepticism from the original skeptic Pyrrho would have seemed a handy explanation for the Academic’s revolt against the true Platonic doctrine. As both Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism declined, though, this Platonic debate seems to have muddied the historical waters to the point that the author of the *Refutation*, writing in the early third century, identifies Academics with Pyrrhonists so strongly that he does not even know that Plato founded the Academy. We can only imagine that the situation would have gotten worse by the time Photius was writing in the tenth century.

These historiographical criticisms, though, would not have occurred to Photius. As far as he was concerned, these works would have simply been the best historical sources he had access to concerning the Academy’s history. The Numenius passage especially must have seemed authoritative, since it was reproduced by Eusebius, a trusted defender of church doctrine whom Photius considered a man of great learning (πολυμαθῆς) (*Bibliotheca* cod. 13). The relatively specialized question of the historical relationship between the Pyrrhonists and the Academics seems unlikely to have come up elsewhere in Photius’ reading, which was mainly focused on religious matters. This point is key, for our interpretative question is not just what συναίρεσιώτης means, but why *Photius* would have employed it to connect Aenesidemus and Tubero.

The historical sources on the Academy that we know Photius to have read, then, would have given him a narrative of institutional unity between Pyrrhonists and skeptical Academics. The *Refutation* says Pyrrho founded the Academy while Eusebius (via Numenius) makes Arcesilaus a direct disciple of Pyrrho, thus making Pyrrho the founder of at least the *skeptical* Academy. If we take Photius to be following his sources on this point, then we can reverse the traditional reading's implications for Aenesidemus' membership of the Academy without changing its institutional understanding of συναρπαισιώτης. For if we assume that Photius is implying not that Aenesidemus was originally an Academic, but that *the skeptical Academy* was originally Pyrrhonian, then referring to an Academic as a Pyrrhonist's συναρπαισιώτης would make perfect sense regardless of whether the Pyrrhonist had ever himself been a member of the Academy. We need not attribute this position to Aenesidemus himself—most likely the *Discourses* do not contain much historical discussion of the origin of Pyrrhonism, if any. Rather, my suggestion is that Photius, relying on his historical sources, took this connection to be a historical fact, and one that any reader familiar with the broad history of the skeptical schools would have known.

This interpretation fulfills both of our desiderata. The present tense of Photius' description is explained by Photius' belief that Pyrrhonists and Academics shared a common teacher in Pyrrho. This would have made followers of the two groups συναρπαισιῶται in the same way that, for example, both Plutarch and Numenius could be described as “fellow Platonists” despite their deep disagreements. The institutional link posited is thus not institutional affiliation to one and the same organization, but a common intellectual line of descent stemming from Pyrrho. This line of descent would remain true—in Photius' mind—regardless of the doctrinal difference between the two schools, making the present tense description a completely plausible description of the link between Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonists and Tubero's Academics.

Our reading accounts for the subsequent discussion of the vast doctrinal differences between Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonists and their rival Academics by positing that Photius would have seen these schools as two different paths that the elucidation of Pyrrho's original teaching had taken. Photius would have been completely unsurprised to see two Platonists fighting about the proper interpretation of Plato or two Stoics fighting over the true nature of the sage—why should the skeptics have been any different? The original revisionary reading, proposing an accusation of “common heresy,” could not satisfactorily explain the immediate pivot to a rather detailed explanation of the differences between the two positions. This new revisionary reading, though, avoids the problem entirely by chalking the use of συναρπαισιώτης up to an assumption of common intellectual descent rather than philosophical similarity. The revised revisionist reading also has the benefit of being grounded entirely in Photius' own text and in texts referenced by Photius rather than historical speculation about Aenesidemus' life.

In the end, the evidence internal to Photius comes out in favor of the revisionary reading. The traditionalists are correct that we should read συναρπαισιώτης as referring to an institutional link between Aenesidemus the Pyrrhonist and Lucius Tubero the Academic, but by reading cod. 212 in isolation, they have missed out on the actual institutional link that Photius was almost certainly referring to. Rather than implying that Aenesidemus was once an Academic, it is much more likely that Photius was simply following his historical sources in implying that the skeptical Academy itself was originally Pyrrhonian.

II. External Evidence

If discussions of Aenesidemus include any mention at all of a debate concerning his link to the Academy, the reader is invariably referred back to the Decleva Caizzi-Mansfeld debate that we have just canvassed.⁴ As we have now seen, however, the scope of that debate is quite restricted. Decleva Caizzi, Mansfeld, and Polito are concerned with the proper interpretation of one word in one sentence of Photius' summary of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*. The *Bibliotheca* summary, however, while obviously invaluable, is far from our only source of information about Aenesidemus. If we are interested in appreciating *all* the evidence for Aenesidemus' potential Academic affiliation (or lack thereof) we will need to look a bit further afield than prior investigations. Let us turn our attention, then, to the evidence of Aenesidemus we have from other sources. As mentioned above, no other mention—even an oblique one—of Aenesidemus' time in the Academy occurs in the historical record. Our task in this section will be to determine the extent to which this should bear on our discussions of the topic.

A. Miscellaneous Evidence

We might begin with the evidence that I take to have little or no bearing on our question. First is Cicero's much-discussed silence on Aenesidemus and Pyrrhonism in general. Much has been made of the fact that, despite the general assumption that the Lucius Tubero mentioned by Photius is Cicero's companion Lucius Aelius Tubero, Cicero never mentions Aenesidemus.⁵ The argument seems to be that if Aenesidemus was a former Academic and friend of a friend, Cicero would have mentioned him at some point. Cicero's silence seems to me, on the contrary, rather unremarkable. It is quite possible that Aenesidemus published his Pyrrhonian works after the brief period in which Cicero was writing on philosophy, or that his movement only became known outside of Alexandria after that point. If this is so, then even if Cicero knew of Aenesidemus—perhaps as a fellow Academic encountered at the feet of Philo, perhaps as a cherished interlocutor of his friend Lucius Tubero—there would have been no reason for Cicero to mention him. Cicero's silence, then, does not speak one way or the other concerning Aenesidemus' relationship with the Academy.

Next is a brief remark made by Aristocles, who informs us that “when nobody had paid attention to [the Pyrrhonists] any more, as if they had never existed at all, a certain Aenesidemus began to revive this nonsense just recently at Alexandria in Egypt” (Aristocles *apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Evan.* xiv 18.29. Polito trans. in Polito 2014, A4). Polito suggests that Aristocles makes a point of placing Aenesidemus in Egypt in order to emphasize the gap between Aenesidemus in Egypt and Timon in Greece—an emphasis that it seems would not prove much if Aenesidemus the Greek had also learned philosophy in Greece (Polito 2014, 52). While intriguing, however, I think that we ultimately cannot put too much stock in Polito's suggestion. It is just as possible, after all, that Aristocles simply wants to tell us that Aenesidemus is located in Alexandria because that is useful biographic information to have.

Finally, it is worth noting that no ancient account of the history of the Academy includes any suggestion that Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism emerged from that institution (although, as we have seen, there are accounts that suggest the opposite). So, for example, Philodemus' *Index Academicorum* includes no mention of Aenesidemus, nor does Book iv of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*. While this may speak slightly against the idea of Aenesidemus' Academic origin, it is just as possible that in a post-

⁴ In, e.g., Bett 2000, Thorsrud 2009, Hankinson 2010, Castagnoli 2019, Bett 2019, Brittain 2021.

⁵ This concern begins with Zeller III (2). See also Brochard 242-3, Stough 1969 9, Hankinson 1995 109, and Thorsrud 2004.

Aenesidemus world where Pyrrhonists and Academics were understood to be two separate philosophical groups, discussion of a former member better known as the founder of a different sect may not have seemed appropriate. Numenius' account of the history of the Academy, for example, includes no mention that Aristotle was associated with it at any point.

B. Diogenes Laertius

We now move on to evidence with a bit more weight, beginning with Book ix of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*.⁶ In order to establish Diogenes as a reliable source on Aenesidemus, let us briefly summarize the manner in which he deploys the Pyrrhonist's work. Aenesidemus is first cited in ix 62, where he is presented as defending a version of Pyrrho's life that allowed him a certain amount of foresight. He is listed as one of the followers of Pyrrho who left behind treatises from which we can glean insight into Pyrrhonian thought at ix 102. Aenesidemus' position on the skeptic's criterion is cited at ix 106 and his stance on the Pyrrhonist's τέλος is cited at ix 107. His *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is quoted in ix 78 and the first book of *Pyrrhonian Discourses* is quoted at ix 106. In the same passage, his works *On Inquiry* and *Against Wisdom* are also cited. The specific ordering of the ten modes he uses is mentioned at ix 87. Finally, Aenesidemus is once again listed as the author of the eight books of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses* at ix 116.

Diogenes clearly had access to Aenesidemus' work, and, crucially, seems to have had access to the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*. The *Discourses* are not only cited in ix 116 as the main work for which Aenesidemus was known, the first book of the *Discourses* is cited specifically in ix 106. It thus seems overwhelmingly likely that Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonian Discourses* was one of Diogenes' main sources for knowledge of Pyrrhonism. This fact will be crucial for us: for whatever information Photius had concerning Aenesidemus, he certainly got it from his copy of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*—including, of course, the information that Aenesidemus was a συναρπασιώτης of Lucius Tubero.

Diogenes, working from a copy of the same text as Photius in addition to others like the *Outlines*, *On Inquiry*, and *Against Wisdom*, makes no mention of an Academic affiliation. Further, no mention is made of him as either a source or a subject in Book iv of the *Lives*, concerning the history of the Academy (although the account cuts off after Clitomachus, so Diogenes may have been a subscriber to the narrative that the so-called “Fourth Academy” of Philo under which Aenesidemus is alleged to have studied was not truly a part of the history of the Academy. Sextus (PH i 220) and Numenius (*Praep. Evan.* xiv 4.16) both note that only some—ἔνιοι—continue the history of the Academy past Clitomachus). Leaving out this bit of history for an author explicitly marked as one of the best sources for the views of Pyrrho's followers would be quite strange for Diogenes, who is notorious for including every biographical detail he could get his hands on.

In fact, we can even identify a passage where Diogenes would have been extremely likely to have mentioned an Aenesidemus-Academy connection had he known about one. This is the end of his discussion of Pyrrhonism, in which Diogenes introduces two rival accounts of Pyrrhonism's chain of transmission after Timon. Aenesidemus finds himself in the latter of these accounts as a student of Ptolemy of Cyrene, and no one else:

[115 cont.] τούτου διάδοχος, ὡς μὲν Μηνόδοτός φησι, γέγονεν οὐδεὶς, ἀλλὰ διέλιπεν ἡ ἀγωγή ἕως αὐτὴν Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Κυρηναῖος ἀνεκτήσατο. ὡς δ' Ἰππόβοτός φησι καὶ Σωτίων, διήκουσαν αὐτοῦ Διοσκουρίδης Κύπριος καὶ Νικόλοχος Ῥόδιος καὶ Εὐφράνωρ

⁶ The best edition of Diogenes for our purposes is in Vogt 2015, which specifically focuses on scholarly issues surrounding his account of Pyrrhonism. For Aenesidemus specifically, Polito 2014's commentary is invaluable.

Σελευκεὺς Πραΰλος τε ἀπὸ Τρωάδος, ὃς οὕτω καρτερικὸς ἐγένετο, καθά φησι Φύλαρχος ἱστορῶν, ὥστε ἀδίκως ὑπομεῖναι ὡς ἐπὶ προδοσίᾳ κολασθῆναι, μηδὲ λόγου τοὺς πολίτας καταξιώσας.

[116] Εὐφράνορος δὲ διήκουσεν Εὐβουλος Ἀλεξανδρεὺς, οὗ Πτολεμαῖος, οὗ Σαρπηδῶν καὶ Ἡρακλείδης, Ἡρακλείδου δὲ Αἰνεσίδημος Κνώσιος, ὃς καὶ Πυρρωνείων λόγων ὀκτὼ συνέγραψε βιβλία· οὗ Ζεύξιππος ὁ πολίτης, οὗ Ζεῦξις ὁ Γωνιόπους, οὗ Ἀντίοχος Λαοδικεὺς ἀπὸ Λύκου· τούτου δὲ Μηνόδοτος ὁ Νικομηδεύς, ἰατρὸς ἐμπειρικός, καὶ Θειωδᾶς Λαοδικεὺς· Μηνόδοτου δὲ Ἡρόδοτος Ἀριέως Ταρσεύς· Ἡροδότου δὲ διήκουσε Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός, οὗ καὶ τὰ δέκα τῶν Σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἄλλα κάλλιστα· Σέξτου δὲ διήκουσε Σατουρνῖνος ὁ ἑκκυθηναῖος, ἐμπειρικός καὶ αὐτός.

[115 cont.] As Menodotus relates, there was no successor of Timon, and his school of philosophy was in hiatus until Ptolemy of Cyrene resumed it. According to Hippobotus and Sotion, Diocurides of Cyprus and Nicolochus of Rhodes were his students, as were Euphranor of Seleucia and Praylus from the Troad, who, as Phylarchus the historian relates, was full of such endurance that he withstood being unjustly punished on a charge of treason, deeming his fellow citizens worthy of not even a word.

[116] Eubulus of Alexandria studied under Euphranor, and Ptolemy studied under Eubulus. Sarpedon and Heracleides studied under Ptolemy, and Aenesidemus of Cnossus, who compiled eight books of Pyrrhonian arguments, studied under Heracleides. Studying with Aenesidemus was his fellow citizen Zeuxippus, who in turn taught Zeuxis the crooked-footed; and Antiochus of Laodicea on the Lycus was Zeuxis' student, while Menodotus of Nicomedeia, a doctor of the Empirical school, and Theiodas the Laodicean, learned studied under Antiochus. Herodotus son of Areius, from Tarsus, was the pupil of Menodotus, and following Herodotus was Sextus the Empiricist, who was also the author of the ten books of Skeptical Writings and other very fine works. Saturninus the ἑκκυθηναῖος, an Empiricist as well, was a student of Sextus. (Diogenes Laertius ix 115-16, in Vogt 2015. Scharffenberger and Vogt trans.)

One of the most striking features of this account is that Diogenes singles out Aenesidemus twice within it to insert additional information about him. First, Diogenes notes that Aenesidemus is the author of the eight books of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*, and second, Diogenes (or perhaps the list's author, although it seems more likely that Diogenes is the originator of the comments within this list) inserts some biographical information regarding Aenesidemus' education, namely that Zeuxippus studied with him under Heracleides. It would be quite puzzling if this was inserted but another piece of information about Aenesidemus' education, widely known and mentioned by Aenesidemus himself, was not.

Even if Diogenes did not want to insert such information into the list being quoted for fear of muddling the narrative set up by the chain of transmission, he could have easily mentioned it as an alternative account in the way Menodotus' report is brought up. If additional information about Aenesidemus' education had been available, ix 115-116 would have been the perfect place to insert it. On balance, then, it seems unlikely that Diogenes believed that Aenesidemus was a member of the Academy.

C. Sextus Empiricus

We will find much the same problem in Sextus Empiricus as we did in Diogenes. Sextus, of course, is a Pyrrhonist in the Aenesidemean tradition, so his debt to Aenesidemus is clear. More to the point, however, his references to Aenesidemus shows a deep knowledge of his positions and easy access to his works. First and foremost, Aenesidemus' ten modes are famously reproduced in exhaustive detail in Book i of Sextus' *Outlines* (PH i 35-163).⁷ Sextus also reproduces in similar detail Aenesidemus' eight modes against the etiologists, which we know from Photius comprised a large portion of the fifth book of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses* (PH i 180-6, *Bibliotheca* 170b 17-22). Additionally, Sextus explicitly cites the fourth book of the *Discourses* for Aenesidemus' arguments against signs in *Against the Logicians* (M viii 215-16, 234). Lengthy arguments against the possibility of anything coming to be (M ix 218-26) and against truth (M viii 40-54) are cited in *Against the Physicists* and *Against the Logicians*, respectively.⁸ We also find brief mentions of Aenesidemus' argument against the existence of the good in *Against the Ethicists* (M xi 42) and his position on Plato in the *Outlines* (PH i 222). Finally, there are quite a few references to Aenesidemus' "Heraclitean" positions scattered throughout Sextus' works, to which we will return shortly.

Sextus, then, was obviously extremely well-acquainted with Aenesidemus' work (as we would expect), and once again we find explicit citations of passages from the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*. Despite this, we find no reference of any kind to an Academic past for Aenesidemus. This would not necessarily strike us as odd and it seems that Sextus is mainly concerned with Aenesidemus' positions and arguments rather than his biography. Like Diogenes, however, we find in Sextus as well a passage where it would have been strange not to mention Aenesidemus' connection to the Academy had he been aware of it.

This passage is chapter 33 of PH i, where Sextus is concerned to distinguish Pyrrhonian skeptics from the Academics—a concern that, as we have seen, originates with Aenesidemus. The chapter additionally includes a lengthy history of the Academy from Plato to Antiochus. Two factors make it quite likely that Sextus would have mentioned Aenesidemus' Academic origins here. First, despite the chapter's task of distinguishing Pyrrhonism from the Academy, Sextus is more than happy to note members of the Academy whom he believes to be proper skeptics, or at least quite close—Arcesilaus' ἀγωγήν is singled out as seeming to Sextus "virtually the same" as that of the Pyrrhonists (PH i 232). In fact, Sextus takes the "Academies" out of order—Old, New, and then Middle—seemingly specifically to contrast his unabashedly negative take on the Old and New Academies with his more appreciative account of Arcesilaus' Middle Academy. Regardless of chronology, then, this would have been an ideal opportunity to insert at least a mention of another Academic with whom Sextus was in substantial agreement: Aenesidemus.

Second, Aenesidemus himself is mentioned in this section as either a proponent or opponent (the text is corrupt) of the view that Plato was a skeptic—a view with which Sextus disagrees.⁹ This is the passage (the corruption is marked by *cruces*):

⁷ Sextus identifies the ten modes as stemming from Aenesidemus in M vii 345.

⁸ Polito 2014 takes M ix 218-26 to be sourced from the second book of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*, but I see no reason to suspect that it derives from that work specifically. Similarly, he identifies M viii 40-54 with the third book of the *Discourses*, but this once again seems to me like a stretch.

⁹ See Perilli 2005, Bonazzi 2011, and Polito 2014 160-3 for the best discussions of this corruption and the possible emendations that have been suggested.

περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν δογματικῶν αὐτὸν εἶναι λεγόντων, ἢ κατὰ μὲν τι δογματικόν, κατὰ δὲ τι ἀπορητικόν, περισσὸν ἂν εἶη λέγειν νῦν' αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὁμολογοῦσι τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς διαφορὰν. περὶ δὲ τοῦ εἰ ἔστιν εἰλικρινῶς σκεπτικὸς πλατύτερον μὲν ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι διαλαμβάνομεν. νῦν δὲ ὡς ἐν ὑποτυπώσει λεγόμεν ἄκαταπερμηδοτονῆ καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (οὗτοι γὰρ μάλιστα ταύτης προέστησαν τῆς στάσεως). ὅτι ὅταν ὁ Πλάτων ἀποφαίνεται περὶ ἰδεῶν ἢ περὶ τοῦ πρόνοιαν εἶναι ἢ περὶ τοῦ τὸν ἐνάρετον βίον αἰρετώτερον εἶναι τοῦ μετὰ κακιῶν. εἴτε ὡς ὑπάρχουσι τούτοις συγκατατίθεται, δογματίζει. εἴτε ὡς πιθανωτέροις προστίθεται, ἐπεὶ προκρίνει τι κατὰ πίστιν ἢ ἀπιστίαν, ἐκπέφυγε τὸν σκεπτικὸν χαραχτήρα' (PH i 222, in Mutschmann 1912, emendation removed)

It would be superfluous to say anything here about those who say that Plato is dogmatic, or partly dogmatic and partly aporetic; for they themselves agree on his difference from us. As to whether he is purely sceptical, we deal with this at some length in our *Commentaries*. Here, in an outline, we say [...] and Aenesidemus (who were the main proponents of this position), that when Plato makes assertions about Forms or about the existence of Providence or about a virtuous life being preferable to a life of vice, then if he assents to these things as being really so, he is holding beliefs; and if he commits himself to them as being more plausible, he has abandoned the distinctive character of Scepticism, since he is giving something preference in point of convincingness and lack of convincingness—and that even this is foreign to us is clear from what I have already said. (PH i 222, Annas and Barnes 2000 trans., emendation removed)

Surely this passage would have been an opportune time to mention an Academic connection. We find ourselves in a chapter concerning the history and purported skepticism of the Academy, and at a passage where Aenesidemus is brought in specifically to discuss the skepticism or lack thereof within the Academy. A comment concerning Aenesidemus' personal connection to the Academy could serve as a testament to his expertise if he agrees with Sextus, as an explanation of his sympathy towards Plato if he disagrees, or just as a relevant comment given his cropping up within a history of the Academy.¹⁰ A remark to this effect would be particularly apt if, as has been traditionally assumed, Aenesidemus was a *proponent* of the skeptical interpretation of Plato. Lingering Academic sympathies would go a long way towards explaining what Sextus clearly feels is an inappropriate lapse into Plato-worship. The fact that an Academic affiliation is mentioned in neither of these places, nor anywhere else, speaks to some extent against the idea that Aenesidemus was once an Academic.

Now, it may strike some as possible that Sextus in fact knew that Aenesidemus had begun as an Academic and suppressed this knowledge to shore up the claim that Pyrrhonists and Academics were distinct schools. Aside from the fact this reasoning would not apply to Diogenes, this ultimately seems highly unlikely for three reasons.

First, Aenesidemus' works were still in circulation at the time of Sextus' writing, as evidenced by the fact that Sextus himself had access to them and that Photius had access to them centuries later. If (as the traditional account has it) the information that Aenesidemus had been a member of the Academy was in these works, this would be a point to be *addressed* rather than suppressed. It would have been particularly apposite for Sextus to have addressed this potential source of

¹⁰ As Perilli notes, the corrupt passage may be a sign of a significant lacuna in our text, and the possibility that such a lacuna would have contained a comment of the type I am suggesting would have been present had Aenesidemus been an Academic cannot be completely ruled out. Nevertheless, it seems far more likely that a remark of this nature would have been inserted after either Αἰνησίδημος or καὶ.

confusion in the section distinguishing the Pyrrhonists from the Academics, which, as we have noted, he did not.

Second, as we have seen, Sextus is not uniformly hostile to the Academy, even going so far as to say that Arcesilaus seems not to have differed from the Pyrrhonists on much at all. If Aenesidemus had begun his career as an Academic reformer harkening back to Arcesilaus' radical skepticism (as some commentators have suggested), it does not seem that Sextus would have had much reason to be embarrassed by this fact. Again, the perfect opportunity to mention this would have been in the section distinguishing Pyrrhonists from Academics, most likely in the discussion of Arcesilaus' great similarity to the Pyrrhonists.

Finally, and crucially, Sextus shows on multiple occasions that he is more than willing to take Aenesidemus to task for dogmatism, especially concerning his Heracliteanism.¹¹ In fact, just over half of the references Sextus makes to Aenesidemus (10 of 19) refer not to his skepticism, but to his Heraclitean positions (Polito 2014, 24). More to the point, the section of Book I in which Sextus distinguishes Pyrrhonism from all the schools to which it has been compared *begins* with an explicit takedown of Aenesidemus' position that skepticism leads to dogmatic Heracliteanism.¹² The suggestion that Sextus means to save his school some embarrassment by dissociating its founder from a rival school thus falls completely flat. Surely saying that Aenesidemus had spent some time in the Academy before repudiating it would be less embarrassing than outright accusing him of Heraclitean dogmatism. It thus seems quite likely that Sextus did not believe Aenesidemus to have had any affiliation with the Academy.

D. Taking Stock of the External Evidence

It is, of course, difficult to conclude much about a question from authors who do not address it. We have seen, however, that both Diogenes and Sextus had ample reason to mention an Aenesidemus-Academy association as well as all the same evidence (and more!) that would have been available to Photius. Despite this, no reference to an Academic period in Aenesidemus' life is ever made. Our non-Photius evidence, then, seems to lend itself to the conclusion that Aenesidemus was not a member of the Academy. Again, though, this conclusion is a tentative one and must come with the caveat that while the non-Photius evidence seems to fit *better* with the position that Aenesidemus was not an Academic, it is not *inconsistent* with his having once been one. In combination with the internal evidence, however, the conclusion that emerges is clear.

III. Pyrrhonism Reconsidered

The implications of this for our understanding of the history of Pyrrhonism are far-reaching. Indeed, they go back to Pyrrho himself, especially to the debate over whether we should take him to have been a "Pyrrhonist" in the sense of Sextus Empiricus or a kind of dogmatist.¹³ The "dogmatic Pyrrho" position, as championed especially by Richard Bett, sees Pyrrho as taking the position that all things are indeterminate by nature, a dogmatic position that would be totally unacceptable to the kind of suspension recommended by Aenesidemus or Sextus.¹⁴ One important source of support for Bett's position is that the sources linking Pyrrho to a Pyrrhonist position all postdate Aenesidemus'

¹¹ Most notably at PH i 210-212 but see also PH iii 138, M vii 349-50, M viii 8

¹² Sextus, at least, presents Aenesidemus' position as dogmatic. For an argument that Aenesidemus actually proposed not a dogmatic but a skeptical reading of Heraclitus, see Polito 2004 and Polito 2014.

¹³ The debate mainly concerns the infamous "Aristocles passage" reproduced in *Praep. Evan.* xiv 18.4. For the "skeptical Pyrrho" position, see Brennan 1998, Lesses 2002, Thorsrud 2009, and Green 2017.

¹⁴ Bett 2000, 2022. See also Decleva Caizzi 1981, Brunschwig 1994, Hankinson 1995, Lee 2010, and Svavarsson 2010.

Pyrrhonist revival: at key points where evidence might seem to point to a Pyrrhonist reading of Pyrrho, Bett attributes the position to a Pyrrho refracted through Aenesidemus (Bett 2000, 14, 41-43, 52-53). Buttressing this argumentative strategy is the idea that Aenesidemus' philosophical concerns mainly stem from criticisms of Academic philosophizing.¹⁵ For if Aenesidemus' position was inspired mainly by debates within the Academy, then any link between his own position and Pyrrho's is quite likely to have been basically anachronistic, constructed after the fact in order to more strongly link Aenesidemus' reform movement to the figure he had chosen to name it after. Indeed, this is precisely what Bett argues (Bett 2000, 14).

If we do away with this narrative, though, then it seems far more likely that Aenesidemus came to call his position Pyrrhonism first and foremost due to genuine respect for and inspiration from the Pyrrhonist position as relayed through Timon. Of course, it is possible that Aenesidemus misread or aggressively revised the position that he found in those original Pyrrhonist works, but the more parsimonious explanation is simply that Pyrrho's philosophy as relayed through Timon was the genuine major inspiration for Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism. In this case, the fact that sources linking Pyrrho to broadly Pyrrhonist positions post-date Aenesidemus would not speak against their accuracy at all, for Aenesidemus himself would be a genuine member of a Pyrrhonist rather than an Academic intellectual tradition. Our conclusion, then, lends support to the idea that Pyrrho was himself mainly concerned with epistemological issues along the lines of the Pyrrhonist tradition that took inspiration from him.

Of course, our conclusion more directly concerns the Pyrrhonist revival than Pyrrho's original position, and here too we find some intriguing consequences. For taking away the Academic origin narrative does not completely do away with the evidence we have concerning Aenesidemus' education. As we have seen, Diogenes Laertius reproduces two lineages of Pyrrhonist thinking from at least three sources (Hippobotus, Sotion, and Menodotus), both of which include Aenesidemus. It has long been recognized that these lists (especially the succession from Timon to Ptolemy) are probably historically unreliable, but it is striking that their major point of agreement comes two generations *before* Aenesidemus, with Ptolemy of Cyrene. Diogenes first presents a line of teachers stretching from Timon to Ptolemy but notes that Menodotus says there is a gap between those two points.¹⁶ Both lists, however, agree that from Ptolemy forward there is a Pyrrhonist line of succession. Regardless of concerns about chronological gaps or unhistorical doxographical motivations, then, it seems to have simply been commonly accepted in the ancient world that the Pyrrhonist revival began with Ptolemy. At the very least, it is striking that we have no indication of any ancient narrative placing *Aenesidemus* as the reviver of that tradition.

Although we must approach these lists cautiously, given our new reading of the συναρπείωτης passage they are now our only evidence for Aenesidemus' intellectual origins. On their basis, then, we might tentatively conclude that Aenesidemus was not a *sui generis* Pyrrhonist, but rather at least took some inspiration from a few forebears. At a minimum, this could have looked something like Ptolemy as a known defender of Pyrrhonism, keeping its relevance alive before Aenesidemus emerged with a sophisticated theoretical defense of the doctrine. On a more substantial reading, we might even believe Diogenes' account to the extent of accepting that

¹⁵ See Bett 2000, ch. 4, where Bett identifies Academic acceptance of Stoic positions as a key motivating factor for Aenesidemus' thought and identification with Pyrrho.

¹⁶ The exact point where each authors' list ends and the next begins is not entirely clear, but it is certain that at least two sources converge on Ptolemy: Menodotus and the source Diogenes uses to connect the list beginning with Timon up to the list beginning with Ptolemy. This may be Hippobotus, Sotion, both, or some unnamed fourth source.

Aenesidemus learned to appreciate Pyrrhonism from a teacher who was himself a self-avowed Pyrrhonist in a tradition started by Ptolemy. Of course, if any such tradition existed, it was likely quite minor before Aenesidemus' work brought it to prominence.

Regardless of the extent to which we believe that Aenesidemus took inspiration from Ptolemy, the agreement that there were Pyrrhonists two generations prior to Aenesidemus points to an interest in Pyrrhonism as a standalone theoretical position that predated Aenesidemus. We may, then, want to revise the currently accepted narrative that Pyrrhonism was almost entirely forgotten until Aenesidemus revived it. It may, rather, have survived as a minor tradition which was respected and studied enough to be defended by a figure like Ptolemy or criticized by a figure like Cicero until Aenesidemus made it more widely discussed.¹⁷ The traditional narrative has obscured this possibility by assuming that Aenesidemus' skepticism was basically Academic in inspiration.

The above claims are, I think, fully licensed by our revised revisionary reading and give us important insights into the history of Pyrrhonism in both its original and Aenesidemean forms. I would like to end with one far less certain, far more speculative possibility concerning Aenesidemus' education. We have already noted that the successions reproduced by Diogenes are suspect in some ways, but we have also noted that it is striking how the different narratives agree on the figure of Ptolemy. If we take it as a given that Ptolemy had something to do with the revival of Pyrrhonism leading up to and past Aenesidemus, an intriguing possibility emerges. For Ptolemy of Cyrene is usually identified as the doctor Ptolemy who is cited by Galen and Celsus (Deichgräber frgs. 16-17). In fact, both Galen and Celsus mention Ptolemy in the same context as one Heraclides of Tarentum, which has led to the identification of Diogenes' Heraclides, student of Ptolemy, with the Empiricist doctor Heraclides of Tarentum. Heraclides having lived about a generation earlier than Aenesidemus, his being a teacher or at least an inspiration for the Pyrrhonist is not outside of the realm of possibility (Guardasole 1997).

Following Aenesidemus come a few entries in the succession about whom we know very little other than that they were Pyrrhonists whose works are cited by Diogenes: Zeuxis, Zeuxippus, and Antiochus of Laodicea. Antiochus, though, is said to be the teacher of Theodas of Laodicea (plausibly identified with the Empiricist doctor mentioned by Galen) and Menodotus, the famous empirical doctor, who taught one Herodotus of Tarsus, teacher of Sextus Empiricus. All of this leaves us with the following curious fact: both extant narratives agree that Ptolemy the doctor was a key figure in the Pyrrhonist lineage and we know that this lineage continued on down to Sextus Empiricus, also a doctor. In between these two figures Diogenes provides a list of names many of whom are also plausibly or definitely identifiable as doctors. Given this evidence, it seems possible that the Pyrrhonist revival that found its apex in Aenesidemus *began* among doctors, rather than being ported over to the medical realm as is usually assumed.

¹⁷ Cicero's brief comments on Pyrrho are generally read as suggesting a dogmatic and moralizing Pyrrho, but this does not seem quite right to me. For Cicero admits that his reading of Pyrrho leaves the philosopher espousing a nonsensical doctrine where virtue is the most desirable thing and yet there can be no object of desire (*De Finibus* iv 43). Cicero chalks this up to incoherence on Pyrrho's part, but if we wish to be a bit more charitable, it may in fact indicate a position quite like the one found at PH i 25 where the skeptic aims at a certain mental state or way of life which is only achievable by foregoing dogmatic thinking. As for Cicero's declaration that Pyrrho's thought has been "discarded," it is interesting (although far from conclusive) to note that the substance given to this claim is that people have long since stopped *arguing against* Pyrrhonism (*De Finibus* ii 43), which is not quite a claim that nobody *defends* the position. Certainly the philosophers Cicero respected no longer gave the doctrine the time of day, but this may not have stopped others from doing so.

Of course, the alternative possibility is that the succession listed by Diogenes is a fabrication from a later Empiricist Pyrrhonist forged in order to establish a greater historical link between the medical and philosophical schools. This position has been most forcefully defended by Roberto Polito, especially on the assumption that the Menodotus cited as one of the authorities of the history of the school is the Empiricist Menodotus (Polito 2007). The fabrication theory, though, is weakened by the fact that multiple narratives, not just Menodotus', agree on the importance of Ptolemy in the line of succession. It is far from certain, too, that Menodotus the Empiric and Menodotus the historian are the same figure—and a strong case has been made that they are not (Perilli 2005). We also know that shortly after Aenesidemus, Cassius the Pyrrhonist inaugurated a debate internal to the Empiricist school concerning the extent to which Empiricists used “transition to the similar” in their practice (*Subf. Emp.* 49-50)—a debate that involved Menodotus and Theodas and to which Sextus seems to be contributing with his remarks on the necessity of recollective signs (PH ii 102).¹⁸ It seems probable, then, that Empirical doctors were involved with Pyrrhonism before, during, and after Aenesidemus' *floruit*.

This is not necessarily to suggest that Aenesidemus himself was a doctor. It is possible that he was—and the consistent use of medical examples in Sextus' reproduction of the ten modes (PH i 44, 46, 51, 81-84, 101-103, 126-127, 133) along with his eight modes of arguments against etiological explanations (PH i 180-185, *Bibliotheca* 170b 17-22) are intriguing on this front—but Diogenes' narrative gives us a more sober option as well. We are told there that Aenesidemus studied under Heraclides *along with* his fellow citizen Zeuxippus, and it is from Zeuxippus that the rest of the succession down through Sextus and Saturninus proceeds. Notably absent from the line of succession are important Pyrrhonist figures like Agrippa and Cassius. It seems possible, then, that Aenesidemus and Zeuxippus both took inspiration from a small group of doctors who had recently revived interest in Pyrrhonism (most likely, as is usually assumed about the relationship between Pyrrhonism and Empiricism in general, in order to combat the theories of the “dogmatic” Rationalist doctors), but that they took this inspiration in two different directions. Zeuxippus would have continued the medical focus of the nascent tradition and taught doctors while Aenesidemus would have found himself interested in its more purely philosophical aspects and taught philosophers like Agrippa. Speculative though this all may be, it seems a speculation warranted by the evidence that is available to us—and it is, at the very least, more likely than the possibility that Aenesidemus had been an Academic.

Conclusion

We have now seen that the most likely interpretation of Photius' cod. 212 does not suggest that Aenesidemus was ever institutionally linked to the Academy. Rather, following Photius' own sources, it is likely that the suggestion being made is that the Academy itself was institutionally linked to Pyrrhonism. We have also seen that authors who would have had access to all the same evidence as Photius, and who would have had good reason to mention a link between Aenesidemus and the Academy, fail to do so. Our conclusion is thus relatively clear: we have no reason to believe that Aenesidemus was ever an Academic, and references to an Academic period in his life are groundless.

That Aenesidemus was influenced by the Academics is all but certain. That he took pains to critique and distance himself from them is evident. To refer to him as a “colleague” or a “student”

¹⁸ This dating assumes that Cassius the Pyrrhonist is the Cassius mentioned by Celsus, but cf. von Staden 1996 for some possible doubts.

of the Academics, however, is to go too far. Such statements rest on an interpretation of Photius' text that is grounded in an assumption about the history of skepticism rather than in the evidence we actually have concerning Photius' own understanding of it. Not only this, they give us an inaccurate picture of the Hellenistic philosophical landscape and Aenesidemus' place within it. A thorough examination of the evidence gives us no reason to believe that Aenesidemus was ever an Academic.¹⁹

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